SUKANYA

Sukanya, a princess, curiously pokes at two bright sparks in an anthill. She is horrified when she realizes that the sparks are actually the eyes of the great Sage Chyavana. He is blinded and a blight descends upon the entire kingdom. There is respite only when Sukanya agrees to leave her family and her royal home to marry the sage and serve him faithfully.

This version is taken from the Mahabharata, but references to Sukanya's integrity appear in the Bhagawat Purana, the Devi Purana and the Rigveda. She remains faithful to Chyavana, eventually shaming even the heavenly twins, the Ashwini Kumaras.

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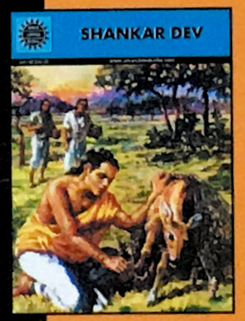

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EPICS & MYTHOLOGY

AMAR CHITRA KATHA

SUKANYA

THE PRINCESS WHO MARRIED A SAGE

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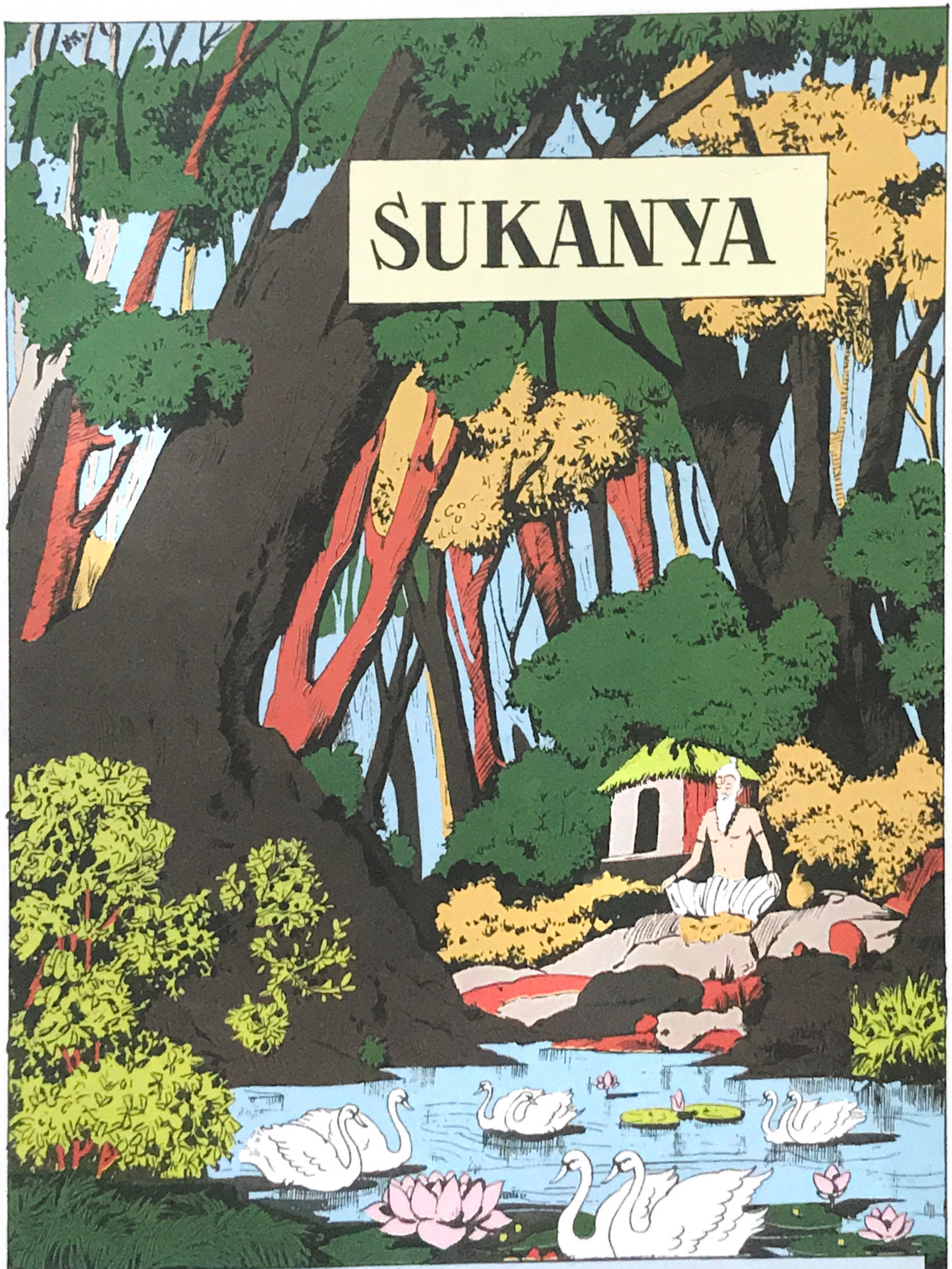
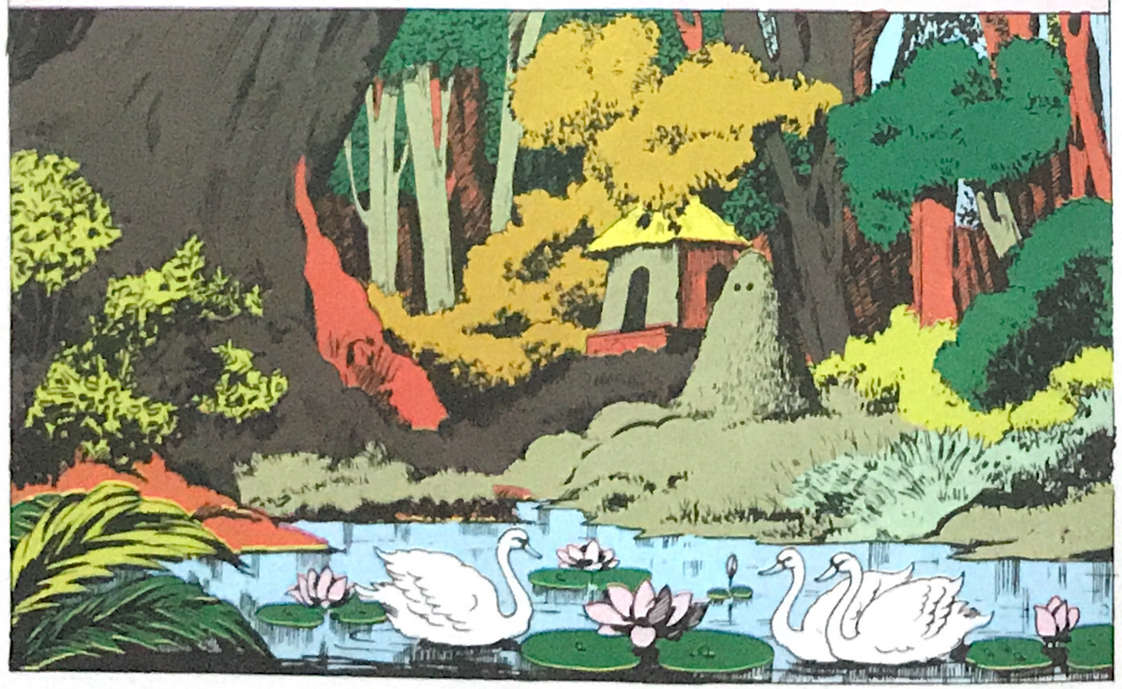
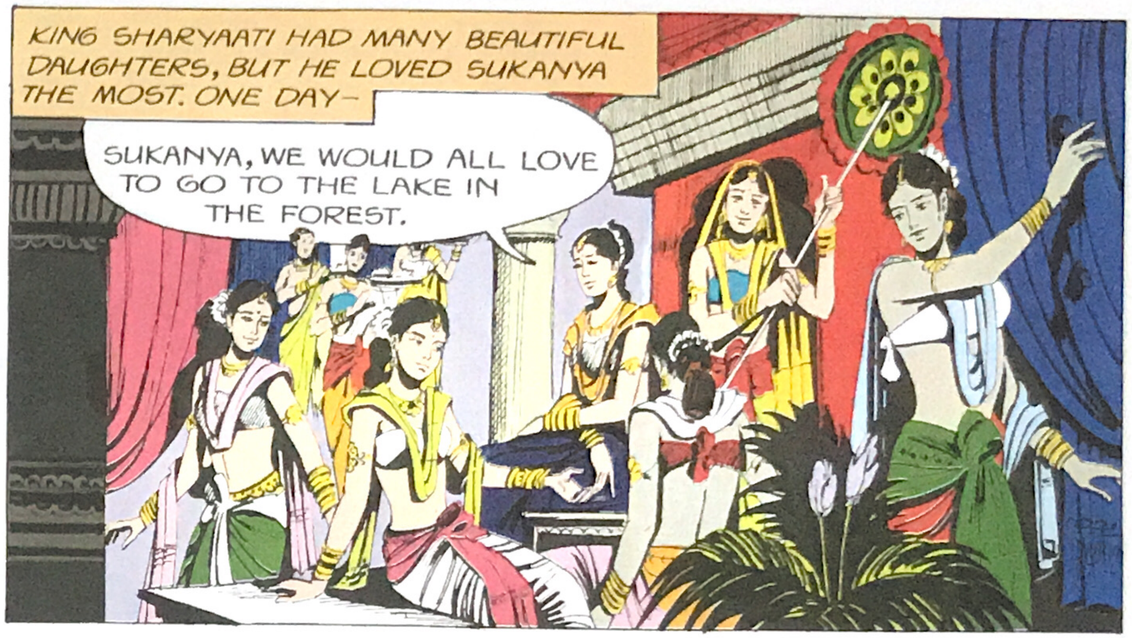
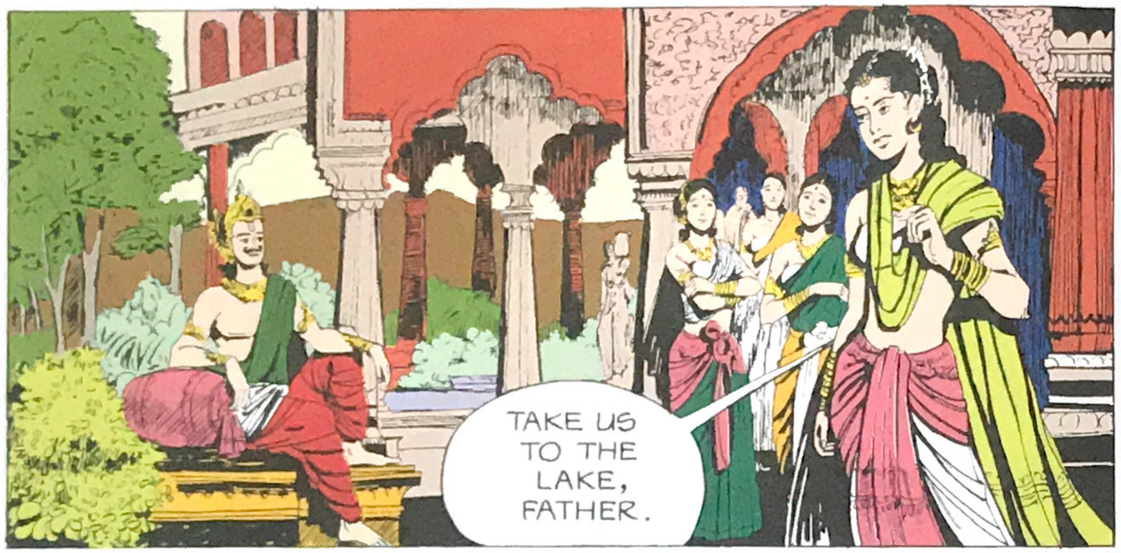
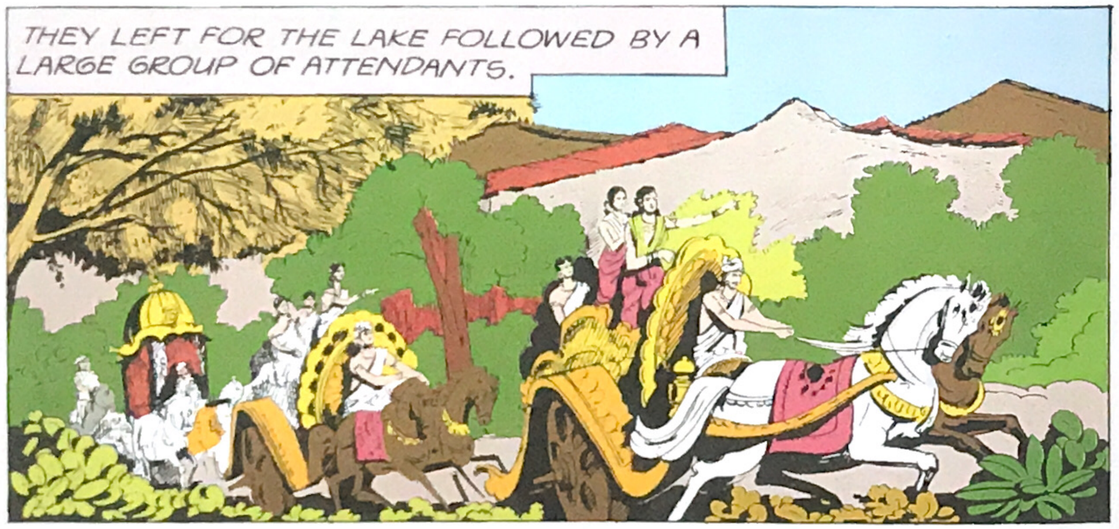

SUKANYA
LONG LONG AGO, THERE LIVED A SAGE CALLED CHYAVANA. HE PERFORMED HIS PENANCES AND AUSTERITIES AND MEDITATED NEAR A LAKE IN A JUNGLE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF SHARYAATI'S KINGDOM.

...AND YEARS ROLLED BY. CHYAVANA CONTINUED TO MEDITATE. HE WAS COMPLETELY COVERED BY AN ANTHILL BUT BEING DEEPLY IMMERSED IN MEDITATION, HE WAS NOT AWARE OF ANYTHING.






TAKE US TO THE LAKE, FATHER.


THEY LEFT FOR THE LAKE FOLLOWED BY A LARGE GROUP OF ATTENDANTS.

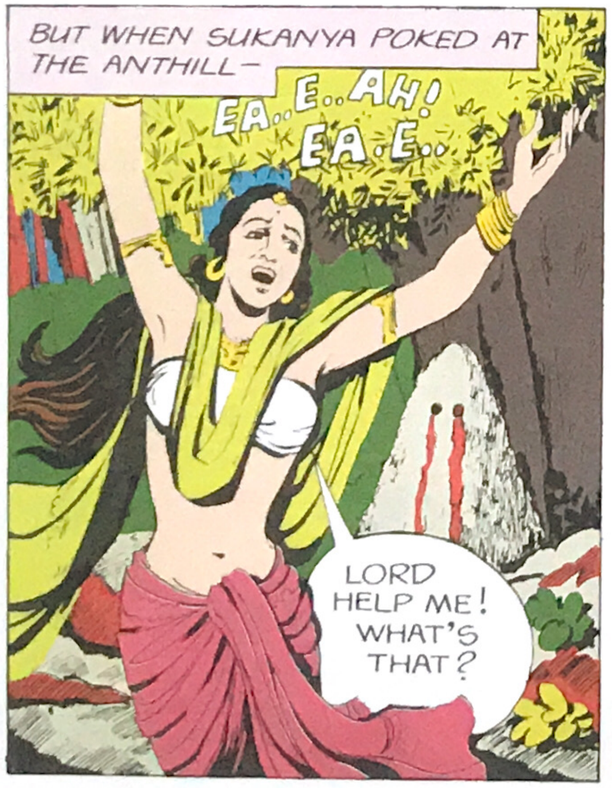
I'LL WANDER OFF TO MY FAVOURITE GROVE.
SUKANYA STRAYED AWAY FROM THE REST.

SUDDENLY SOMETHING IN THE DISTANCE ATTRACTED HER ATTENTION.
WHAT IS THAT? A HEAP OF MUD?

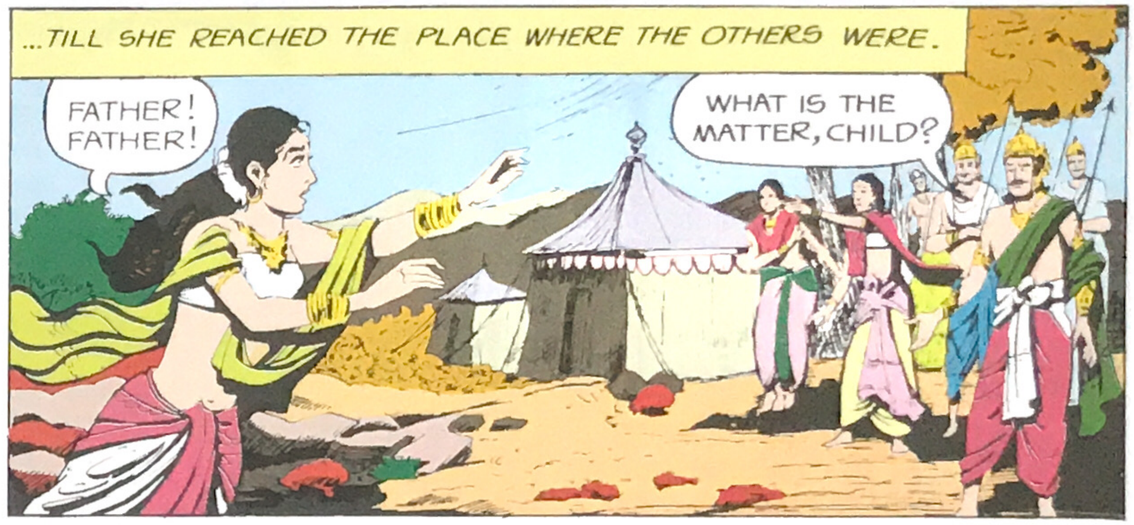
SHE CAME NEARER.
OH! IT'S AN ANTHILL. WHAT ARE THOSE SHINING OBJECTS?

COULD THEY BE FIREFLIES? I'LL DRIVE THEM OUT AND CATCH THEM. THE OTHERS WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO SEE THEM.

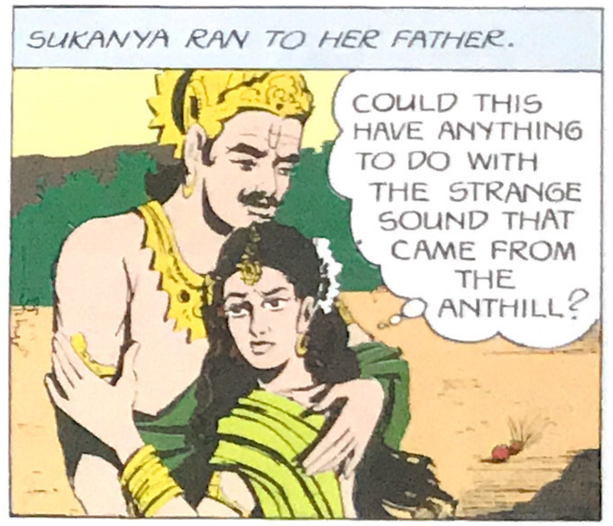
I MUST CATCH BOTH TOGETHER.


BUT WHEN SUKANYA POKED AT THE ANTHILL—
EA..E..AH!
EA..E..
LORD HELP ME! WHAT'S THAT?

SUKANYA WAS TERRIFIED. SHE RAN FOR HER LIFE AND DID NOT STOP...
FATHER! FATHER!


...TILL SHE REACHED THE PLACE WHERE THE OTHERS WERE.
FATHER! FATHER!
WHAT IS THE MATTER, CHILD?

THERE A STRANGE SIGHT MET HER EYES. THE KING'S MEN WERE WRITHING IN PAIN.


SUKANYA RAN TO HER FATHER.
COULD THIS HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE STRANGE SOUND THAT CAME FROM THE ANTHILL?

THE KING WAS PERPLEXED BY THIS SUDDEN SCOURGE THAT HAD HIT ALL THE MEN.
COULD THIS BE A CURSE? I WONDER... PERHAPS.
WE SHALL RETURN TO THE PALACE.

I MUST TELL FATHER WHAT HAPPENED AT THE ANTHILL.

WE WERE NEAR THE HERMITAGE OF SAGE CHYAVANA WHEN WE WENT TO THE LAKE. HAS ANYONE OFFENDED THE GREAT SAGE? FIND OUT IMMEDIATELY.

I WILL, YOUR MAJESTY.

THE MINISTER BEGAN ASKING QUESTIONS.

HAS ANYONE ANNOYED SAGE CHYAVANA?

NOT I.

NOT I.

MEANWHILE SUKANYA WALKED UP TO THE KING.

FATHER, I HAVE TO TELL YOU SOMETHING.

SPEAK, MY CHILD, I AM LISTENING.

NEAR THE LAKE, I SAW AN ANTHILL. EMBEDDED IN IT WERE TWO BRIGHT OBJECTS WHICH LOOKED LIKE FIREFLIES.

I...I WAS CURIOUS. I POKED AT THEM WITH TWIGS. SUDDENLY FROM THE ANTHILL CAME A CRY OF PAIN. "E...E..EAAAH."

TERRIFIED, I CAME RUNNING BACK TO YOU.

I'LL GO TO THE LAKE AND SEE.

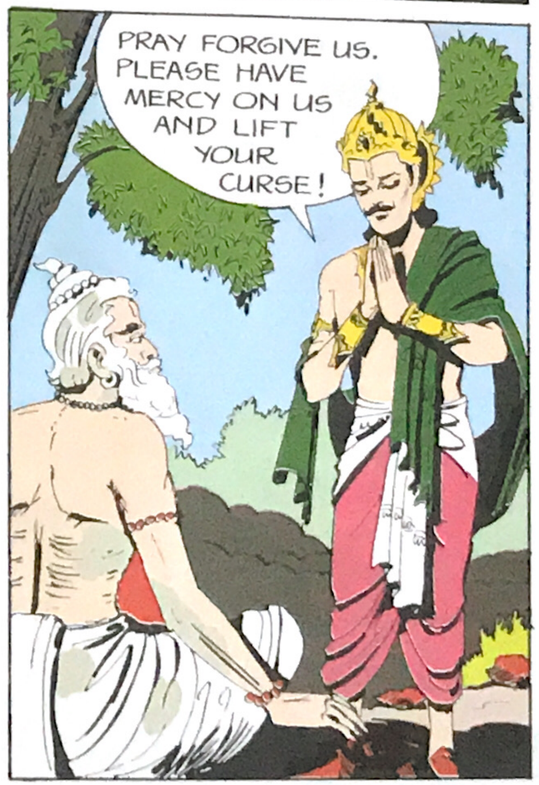
...DAUGHTERS LEFT FOR THE LAKE.

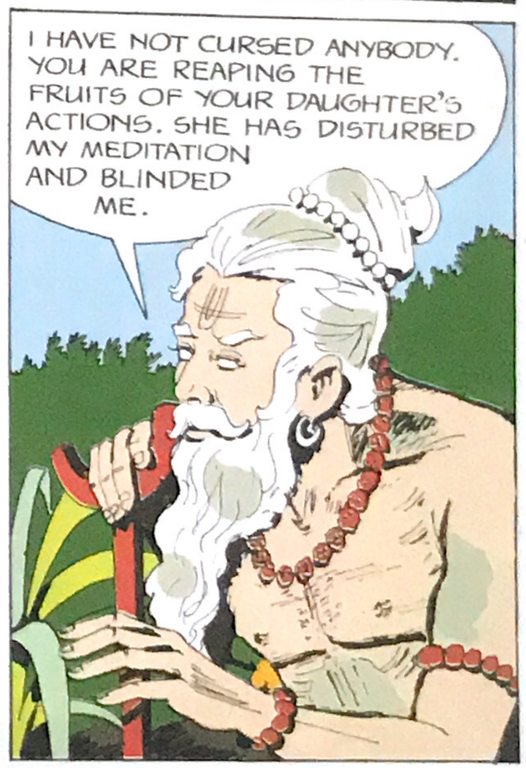
WHEN THE KING SAW THE SAGE WITH PORTIONS OF ANTHILL, STILL STICKING TO HIS BODY –
I CAN GUESS THE HARM DONE BY SUKANYA.

HE GOT DOWN FROM THE HORSE AND APPROACHED THE SAGE.
OH! OH!

PARDON ME! O GREAT ONE, PARDON ME!
TELL ME ALL. WHO SPEAKS TO ME?

I AM KING SHARYAATI. MY DAUGHTER MISTOOK YOUR EYES FOR FIREFLIES AND BLINDED YOU.


PRAY FORGIVE US. PLEASE HAVE MERCY ON US AND LIFT YOUR CURSE!

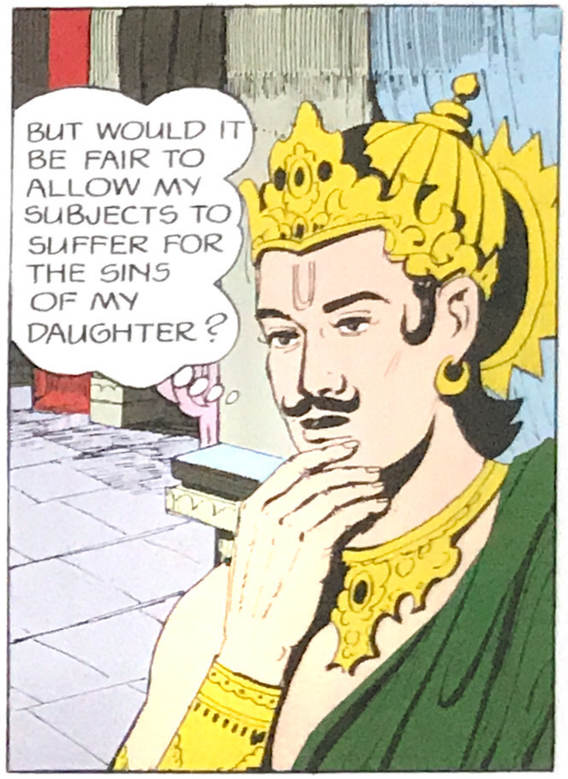

I HAVE NOT CURSED ANYBODY. YOU ARE REAPING THE FRUITS OF YOUR DAUGHTER'S ACTIONS. SHE HAS DISTURBED MY MEDITATION AND BLINDED ME.

HOW CAN WE MAKE AMENDS FOR THIS GREAT SIN? COMMAND ME! ANYTHING! ANYTHING!

I WILL NEED SOMEONE TO LOOK AFTER ME, BLINDED AND HELPLESS AS I AM.
I SHALL SEND A HUNDRED MEN TO SERVE YOU.

I WILL NOT HAVE SERVANTS. I WANT YOUR DAUGHTER TO SERVE ME. THINK ABOUT IT AND LET ME KNOW.

BACK AT THE PALACE—
HOW CAN I. SEND MY FAVOURITE DAUGHTER TO SERVE THIS OLD SAGE?


BUT WOULD IT BE FAIR TO ALLOW MY SUBJECTS TO SUFFER FOR THE SINS OF MY DAUGHTER?

JUST THEN—
WHEN DID YOU RETURN FATHER? WHAT DID YOU SEE THERE?

NOTHING. PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE.
NO. YOU MUST TELL ME EVERY-THING.

KNOW THEN, IF YOU MUST. IN THAT ANTHILL WAS SAGE CHYAVANA. AND YOU HAVE BLINDED HIM, DEAR ONE!

THAT IS NOT ALL. NOW, THAT SAGE WANTS YOU TO SERVE HIM!

GLADLY SHALL I SERVE HIM, FATHER. I MUST ATONE FOR MY SIN.

INDEED! NO! YOU A BEAUTIFUL PRINCESS, TO SERVE THAT BLIND OLD SAGE?

FATHER, HAVEN'T YOU TOLD ME THAT BEAUTY WILL SOON VANISH? HAVEN'T YOU TAUGHT ME THAT TRUTH ALONE LASTS FOR EVER?

AND SUKANYA TOOK AN OATH.

IN THE NAME OF GODDESS DURGA I VOW THAT I SHALL MARRY ONLY SAGE CHYAVANA. IF MY WORDS BE TRUE, LET ALL BE RELIEVED OF THE SCOURGE.

THE PAIN HAS LEFT ME!

A MIRACLE! WE ARE CURED!

THEN SHARYAATI, SUKANYA AND THE MINISTER, FOLLOWED BY A GROUP OF SERVANTS CARRYING RICH PRESENTS FOR THE BRIDEGROOM, PROCEEDED TO THE LAKE.

SAGE CHYAVANA REFUSED THE ROYAL GIFTS...

...AND AGREED TO ACCEPT ONLY SUKANYA.

FATHER, PLEASE TAKE AWAY ALL MY JEWELS AND RICH ROBES. I SHOULD WEAR SOMETHING THAT BEFITS MY STATUS.

LEAVING SUKANYA TO THE CARE OF THE SAGE, THE KING RETURNED TO HIS PALACE WITH A HEAVY HEART.

SUKANYA COMPLETELY DEDICATED HERSELF TO THE SERVICE OF HER HUSBAND. SHE PICKED THE FLOWERS FOR HIS RITUALS AND HELPED HIM WITH HIS YAGNAS.

SHE FED HIM...

...AND WASHED HIS HANDS.

I NEVER THOUGHT THAT THERE WOULD BE SO MUCH PLEASURE IN SERVING ANOTHER!

SLEEP WELL, MY LORD! I SHALL WATCH OVER YOU.

MAY THE SAGE BE MY HUSBAND IN ALL MY FUTURE BIRTHS.

ONLY WHEN SHE WAS SURE THAT HER HUSBAND WAS DEEP IN SLUMBER DID SHE HERSELF SLEEP.

AND SO THE YEARS PASSED. ONE DAY THE ASHWINI TWINS HAPPENED TO PASS BY. SUKANYA WAS RETURNING HOME FROM THE LAKE AFTER A BATH.

WE ARE THE ASHWINI TWINS, PHYSICIANS TO THE GODS.

FAIR MAIDEN, TELL US WHO YOU ARE. ARE YOU A GODDESS OR A HUMAN BEING? ARE YOU ALONE IN THIS LONELY FOREST?

WILL THEY BE ABLE TO RESTORE MY HUSBAND'S SIGHT? I WONDER.

WITH THAT HOPE IN HER HEART SUKANYA STOPPED TO ANSWER THEM.

I AM SUKANYA, THE WIFE OF SAGE CHYAVANA. BUT ALAS! HE IS BLIND.

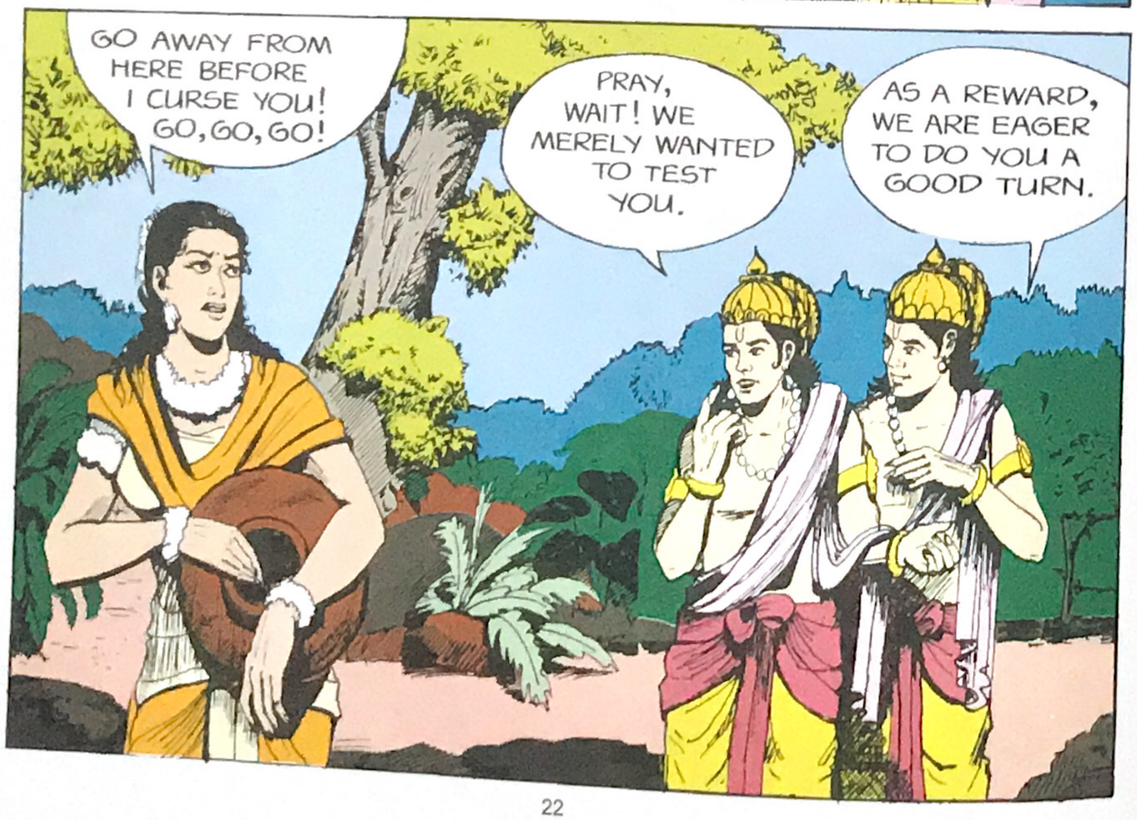
SURELY YOUR FATHER MUST BE A CRUEL MAN TO HAVE GIVEN YOU IN MARRIAGE TO A BLIND, OLD SAGE.

YES, INDEED. HE MUST BE MAD TOO.

WASTE NOT YOUR YOUTH ANY MORE!

MARRY ONE OF US AND BE HAPPY!

HOW DARE YOU SPEAK THESE WORDS TO A CHASTE WOMAN! GODS YOU CLAIM TO BE.


GO AWAY FROM HERE BEFORE I CURSE YOU! GO, GO, GO!
PRAY, WAIT! WE MERELY WANTED TO TEST YOU.
AS A REWARD, WE ARE EAGER TO DO YOU A GOOD TURN.

WE SHALL RESTORE YOUR HUSBAND'S VISION...
AND GIVE HIM BACK HIS YOUTH, TOO. BUT...
BUT...?

...AFTER GIVING HIM BACK HIS VISION, WE SHALL MAKE HIM LOOK EXACTLY LIKE US. AND YOU MUST SPOT HIM.
WHY DO YOU HESITATE? BEING A CHASTE WIFE, YOU SHOULD HAVE NO TROUBLE IN SPOTTING YOUR HUSBAND.
SHALL I AGREE TO THIS TEST?

PRAY, WAIT HERE TILL I RETURN. I SHALL GO TO MY LORD AND SEEK HIS PERMISSION.
WE WILL WAIT.

BACK AT THE ASHRAM, SUKANYA TOLD HER HUSBAND ALL THAT HAD HAPPENED.

ADVISE ME, MY LORD. SHALL I SUBMIT MYSELF TO THIS TEST OF THE GODS?

SUKANYA! YOU HAVE ALL MY BLESSINGS. LEAD ME TO THE PLACE.

THERE SHE COMES, LEADING THE OLD ONE.

HOW COULD SHE HAVE AGREED TO BECOME HIS WIFE?

O GODS! NOW PLEASE RESTORE MY LORD'S SIGHT AND YOUTH.

BRAVE SUKANYA, LEAD YOUR HUSBAND INTO THE LAKE.

NOW WE SHALL IMMERSE OURSELVES. YOU RETURN TO THE BANK AND WAIT TILL WE COME UP AGAIN.

AS SOON AS SUKANYA REACHED THE BANK, ALL THE THREE DISAPPEARED UNDER THE WATER.

AFTER A WHILE THEY CAME UP AGAIN.

I AM YOUR HUSBAND!

I AM YOUR HUSBAND!

I AM YOUR HUSBAND!

CAN'T YOU SPOT ME?

CAN'T YOU SPOT ME?

CAN'T YOU SPOT ME?

O DIVINE MOTHER, HELP ME.

SUKANYA, I AM PLEASED WITH YOUR DEVOTION. LOOK CAREFULLY. ONLY THE EYES OF MORTALS BLINK.

SUKANYA LOOKED CAREFULLY AT THEM FOR A WHILE AND SAW THAT THE EYES OF THE ONE IN THE CENTRE BLINKED.

THIS IS MY HUSBAND.

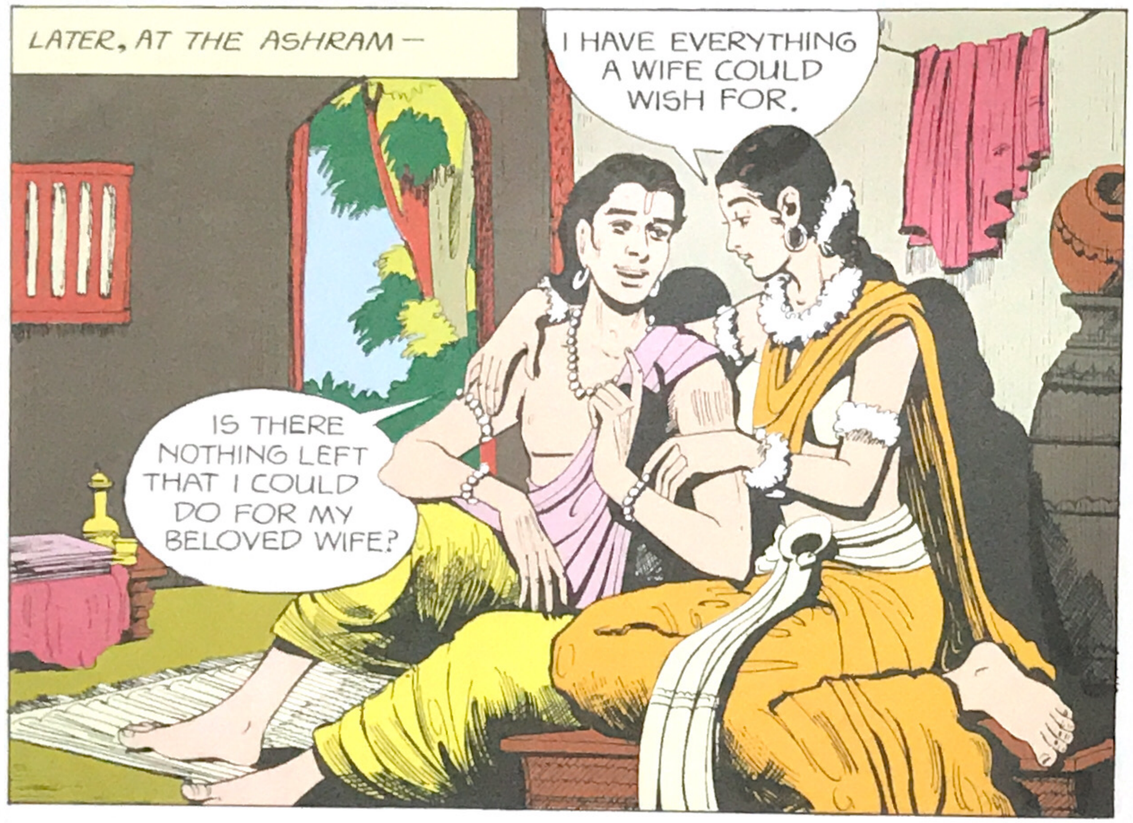
HER GUESS WAS RIGHT. ALL FOUR OF THEM CAME OUT OF THE LAKE.

ON THE BANK THE TWINS AND CHYAVANA BLESSED SUKANYA.

SUKANYA, YOU, A CHASTE WOMAN, HAVE HUMBLED THE VERY GODS!

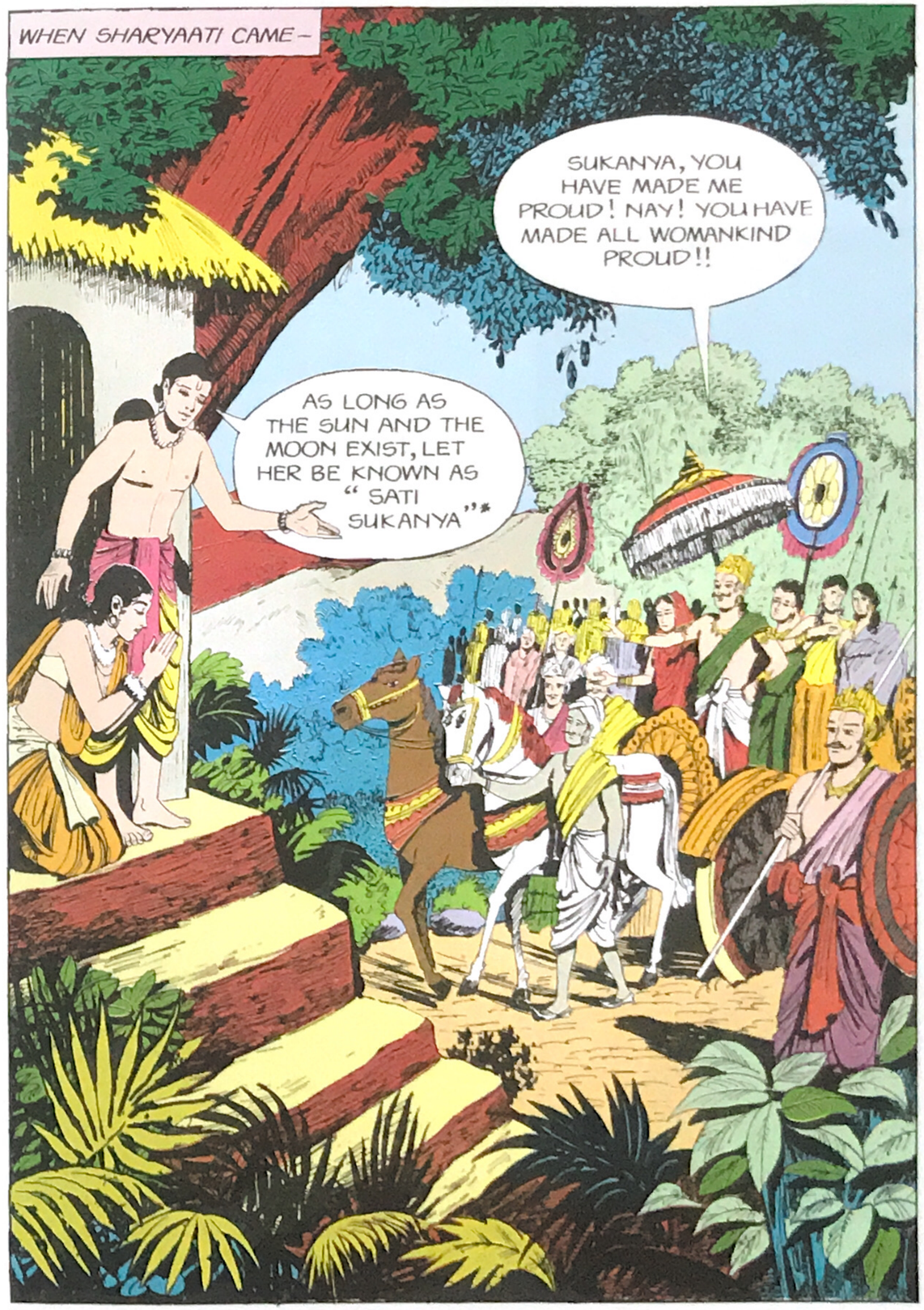
YOUR GLORY SHALL LIVE FOR EVER.

AND THE ASHWINI TWINS DEPARTED.


LATER, AT THE ASHRAM —
I HAVE EVERYTHING A WIFE COULD WISH FOR.
IS THERE NOTHING LEFT THAT I COULD DO FOR MY BELOVED WIFE?

THERE IS SOMETHING, MY LORD!
WHAT IS IT? I WILL...

I LONG TO SEE MY FATHER. HOW HAPPY HE WOULD BE TO SEE US NOW!
HE IS ALREADY ON HIS WAY!


WHEN SHARYAATI CAME —
SUKANYA, YOU HAVE MADE ME PROUD! NAY! YOU HAVE MADE ALL WOMANKIND PROUD!!
AS LONG AS THE SUN AND THE MOON EXIST, LET HER BE KNOWN AS "SATI SUKANYA"*

*CHASTE WIFE.